

# Sudan

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## Freedom of the Press

Continued internal conflict and widespread political protests led the Sudanese authorities to further tighten their grip on the media in 2013. The year was characterized by confiscations of newspaper press runs and a resumption of prepublication censorship on topics prohibited by security services, such as war, the International Criminal Court (ICC), and human rights violations. Arrests of and violence against journalists intensified, particularly during times of protest in June and September.

Freedom of the press and expression are nominally protected under Article 39 of the 2005 Interim National Constitution—adopted as part of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Khartoum government and the then insurgent Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)—though a permanent constitution is currently being drafted following the independence of South Sudan in 2011. While the CPA initially created somewhat greater space for journalists to report more freely and initially reduced the common practice of prepublication censorship, the legal environment for media remains largely unfavorable. In particular, the 2009 Press and Publications Act allows for restrictions on the press in the interests of national security and public order, contains loosely defined provisions related to bans on the encouragement of ethnic and religious disturbances and the incitement of violence, and holds editors in chief criminally liable for all content published in their newspapers. Several other laws are regularly used against the press, including elements of the 1991 penal code, the 2010 National Security Forces Act, and the emergency law applied in the western region of Darfur. A new media law was proposed in January that expands the restrictions of the 2009 Press and Publications Act, extending editorial liability to journalists and printing houses in addition to chief editors. The proposed law was pending further consultation as of late 2013.

Defamation is a criminal offense under the penal code, and there is no freedom of information law, making access to public information difficult.

The press law requires journalists to register with the National Council for Press and Publications (NCP), an entity supervised by the president that also has authority to shut down newspapers for three days without a court order. The NCP, a large proportion of whose members are appointed by the president, regulates the journalism profession and entry into the field. Journalists are required to pass a test prior to receiving accreditation and a license. The Ministry of Information manages broadcast licensing in a highly politicized manner, allowing progovernment stations to acquire licenses more easily than independent outlets.

In 2013, authorities in Khartoum maintained a tight grip on the media sector. Though direct prepublication censorship was officially lifted in 2009, the practice has persisted. In January 2013, government officials called all newspapers in Khartoum and warned them against publishing articles on reported rape cases. In April, the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) officially announced that it was reinstating the previous prepublication censorship policy. Thereafter, several publications confirmed that NISS regularly visited their offices in the evenings to review and remove certain articles before printing. NISS agents also frequently called or summoned editors to deliver censorship directives and insisted that certain journalists be banned from writing or else face suspension as the penalty for noncompliance. In April, NISS agents fired Al-Nour Ahmed al-Nour, chief editor of *Al-Sahafa* newspaper, for allegedly insulting a NISS officer and threatened to permanently shut down the publication if the editor refused to step down. The newspaper

resumed publication with Al-Nour's title of chief editor deleted from the masthead. After protests broke out against fuel hikes, Sudan's most widely circulated daily newspaper, *Al-Intibah*, came under significant pressure from the regime of President Omar al-Bashir to depict the protesters as "saboteurs." Soon after, *Al-Intibah* was ordered by authorities to close indefinitely, according to its website.

Monitoring and censorship of online content was pervasive in 2013. The National Telecommunications Corporation (NTC) closely monitors the internet, including e-mail correspondences, and a "cyber jihadist" unit housed within the NISS proactively monitors online activities and hacks into activists' social-media accounts. Websites and proxy servers that purportedly violate norms of public morality are permanently blocked. The popular forum Sudanese-Online and two online news outlets, *Al-Rakoba* and *Hurriyat*, were obstructed for various periods throughout 2012; all three outlets were eventually unblocked but were at times difficult to access in 2013.

Journalists were regularly harassed, attacked, arrested, detained, and reportedly tortured throughout the year, particularly during times of protest. At the end of June 2013, an international Bloomberg correspondent, accredited by the Sudanese government, was detained and reportedly assaulted by Sudanese authorities during interrogations about his work in the country before being released. Earlier that month, a Sudanese reporter was detained for three days for articles he wrote that allegedly denigrated the armed forces. In October, security forces arrested nine journalists in Omdurman city during their participation in a Sudanese journalists' network seminar. The seminar was convened to discuss concerns over Sudanese authorities' control over newspapers.

Many other journalists and photographers had their equipment confiscated, while bloggers and online journalists were targeted for their posts on social-media sites and online news outlets. In July 2013, Alaa al-Deen Suleiman Khamis and Moataz Ahmed Mohamed al-Masal were arrested in Northern Kordofan for posting and commenting on an article on Facebook that discussed corruption in the Northern Kordofan government's Zakat (philanthropy) Unit. The government's repressive acts against the press have led many journalists to actively self-censor, particularly on sensitive topics.

Despite constraints on journalists, media outlets have proliferated in recent years. There are nearly 20 political dailies operating in the country, plus dozens of sports and social affairs publications. However, experts have argued that there is little difference between private and state-run media, as all are subject to serious government intrusion, ranging from interference in management decisions to censorship of content. Newspapers are generally too expensive for most citizens. The state dominates the broadcast media, which are the main source of information for much of the population. Television programming continues to be formally censored, and radio content largely reflects the government's views. There are approximately 60 private radio stations broadcasting on FM frequencies, in addition to the state radio network. As the licensing of radio stations remains firmly under government control, private stations avoid reporting on political affairs and focus instead on entertainment and music. Internet penetration in Sudan is relatively high for sub-Saharan Africa, with 23 percent of the population accessing the web in 2013. In addition to content censorship, the government shut down the internet altogether on two separate occasions in 2013 in advance of large antigovernment protests; for eight hours in June and again for 24 hours in September. Meanwhile, social-media platforms Facebook and YouTube were reportedly very slow or virtually inaccessible to many users during and after the September 2013 wave of protests.

Ownership of media outlets is generally not transparent, and there are no laws requiring the release of ownership information. Moreover, many owners refrain from acknowledging their status in order to evade taxes and avoid possible attacks. Journalists work for low pay, and many freelancers do not earn enough to cover the cost of living. Some analysts believe this has encouraged corruption within the media, with journalists and editors selling coverage to politicians. Independent media do not receive public subsidies, but do benefit from secret financial support if their coverage is deemed friendly to the government. The

authorities withhold state advertising from newspapers that are critical of the government.

The economic viability of newspaper outlets was further threatened by the government's practice of confiscating entire press runs of newspapers as a deliberate strategy to intimidate and financially cripple critical publications. Widely practiced in 2013, each confiscated edition resulted in thousands of dollars in losses for economically fragile outlets, and in many cases, no official reasons were given for confiscation. In addition, the government reportedly raised taxes on all printing-related expenses in response to widespread press coverage of antigovernment protests in 2012, dealing another financial blow to news outlets that has led to a number of newspapers closing down in recent years.

## **2014 Scores**

### **Press Status**

Not Free

### **Press Freedom Score**

**(0 = best, 100 = worst)**

81

### **Legal Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

26

### **Political Environment**

**(0 = best, 40 = worst)**

33

### **Economic Environment**

**(0 = best, 30 = worst)**

22